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## REVIEWS AND NOTICES.

## SUICIDE IN THE EUROPEAN ARMIES.

The suicide of General Boulanger has furnished the French people with a fertile theme for conversation; and from contemplating the case of an individual many serious persons will turn to the consideration of the great number of suicides which are so frightfully frequent in the ranks, and more especially among the officers of the armies of all the great European powers.

The percentage of self-inflicted deaths has become so great in the French army that the Minister of War sent Dr. Longuet, one of the most distinguished military surgeons, as a delegate to the International Congress of Hygiene and Demography, to communicate to that assembly the results of his interesting statistical study of suicide in the European armies, of which investigation the following appear to be the principal conclusions.

## FREQUENCY OF SUICIDE IN THE EUROPEAN ARMIES.

The Austrian army leads with a yearly average of 122 suicides for every 100,000 effective troops, from 1875 to 1887. The maximum was observed in 1889 with 149 per 100,000; the minimum in 1878 with 97. It will be necessary to add to this proportion of 122 per 100,000 in order to make it complete an average of 40 per 100,000 of abortive attempts of suicide. In this army suicide is sensibly increasing. From 1870 to 1874 the rate was 89 per 100,000; from 1875 to 1880, 112; from 1881 to 1887, 131.

Death by suicide represents a fifth part of the whole mortality of the Austrian army. There is no disease that is more deadly; typhoid fever, pneumonia, and, in some years, tuberculosis, cause fewer deaths.

Following the Austrian army is the German, with 67 per 100,000 from 1878 to 1888; 61 from 1873 to 1878; 57 from 1867 to 1875. That here also suicide is on the increase is shown by earlier statistics, which attribute to the Prussian army 50 per 100,000 from 1829 to 1839; and to the Saxon army, 64 from 1847 to 1858. Besides this number there are in the German army 10 attempts at suicide per 100,000.

In the Italian army, from 1874 to 1889, there were 40 suicides per 100,000 troops. Contrary to the suicide mortality of most of the

other armies, which has rapidly advanced, that of Italy is almost stationary.

In the French army (interior) there were 29 suicides per 100,000 from 1872 to 1889; and from 1862 to 1869, 47. This diminution, which corresponds to new conditions of recruiting, is considerable. In Algeria the French army has twice the proportion of suicides as in the interior, 63 per 100,000 from 1872 to 1889.

In the Belgian army there were 24 suicides per 100,000 from 1875 to 1888.

In the English army there were in the home service from 1882 to 1888, 23 per 100,000. In India, however, the division of Bengal presented during the same period a double suicide mortality, 48 per 100,000.

In the Russian army there were 20 suicides per 100,000 from 1873 to 1889 (including 1876-78), with a maximum of 31 in 1882, and a minimum in 1887 of 15.7.

In the Spanish army, in 1886, there were but 14 suicides per 100,000 effective troops.

#### CONDITIONS OF SERVICE: AGE, GRADE, DIVISION.

In the old armies, especially those recruited by enrollment, it was the older soldiers who generally committed suicide. This is still actually the case in the English army. In France, Italy, Germany, and Austria, on the other hand, it is today the young rather than the old soldiers who commit suicide. In Austria there is, so to speak, an excessive proportion of suicides of young soldiers, who kill themselves during the first month of their service.

The under-officers present three times the proportion of suicides that is found among the troupes; while the officers, who are older men of higher rank, furnish twice the number.

It is among the engineers that the suicides are generally least frequent; among the cavalry and infantry the most. Condemned soldiers in the military prisons and penitentiary institutions rarely take their own life. On the contrary, there are frequent suicides in the corps prisons among those soldiers who are accused and are awaiting trial.

#### MANNER OF SUICIDE.

Shooting is much the most frequent. It counts for more than one-half, and in the Austrian army for three-quarters, of the whole num-

ber. This proportion is four times as large as that offered by the civil population. Hanging and drowning are the two other modes that are most frequent. It is worth while to note that in the English army there is a great frequency of suicide by cutting the throat, a mode of self-murder unknown, so to speak, in the French army, but which occurs to a slight extent in the German.

It is in the infantry that the use of fire-arms is most common. Among the mounted soldiers hanging is much more frequent, and is often accomplished by means of the horse-bridles. In the prisons hanging is the almost exclusive mode.

Those who shoot themselves most universally aim at their heads. The army in Algeria, however, forms an exception. With these soldiers it is almost always the body that is shot; usually the abdomen or the chest; sometimes the neck, the shoulder, an arm, or a leg. May this not be due to the fact that among the Arabs an idea of infamy attaches to the mutilation of the head?

The seasons exercise their influence upon the manner of suicide; and in summer drowning is much more frequent.

#### CAUSES OF SUICIDE.

In the Austrian army a third of the suicides are attributed to a distaste for military duty. This cause shows itself with much less frequency in the other armies. The fear of punishment is said to cause one in three in Austria and Germany, one in five in France, and one in seven in Italy. Suicide caused by some love trouble is much more frequent in France, where one-fifth of the whole number is attributed to this cause, and in Italy, where it is responsible for one-seventh, than in England, Germany, and Austria. Mental disorders represent from one-fifth to one-twelfth of the whole number.

#### INFLUENCE OF THE SEASONS.

The increase of the frequency of suicide during the hot season is as marked in the army as among the civil population. The maximum suicidal mortality is reached during the hottest summer months, and the minimum during the coldest of the winter. Were we to graphically represent, by means of a tabulated map, the suicides that occur in the European armies, we should find them represented by a curve having all the regularity of that of any malady which depends upon the influence of the seasons.

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